

Focus on the Family, Pauline Scripture, and Research:
Comparing Viewpoints on Marriage and Women

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Laura Cox

Thesis Advisor
Kresha Warnock

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kresha Warnock". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Kresha" and last name "Warnock" clearly legible.

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Abstract

The Christian organization Focus on the Family was founded in 1977 by James Dobson, and it quickly became a very popular Christian family-based organization. Because the organization is so wide-spread and influential, it is important to understand its viewpoints on two very important topics – marriage and women. In this paper, Focus on the Family’s viewpoints on these topics are reviewed, along with the biblical writings of the Apostle Paul on marriage and family, as well as recent research in the area. The organization’s viewpoints are then compared separately to what Paul said in his letters and what researchers are finding in their studies. After making these comparisons, it becomes clear that Focus on the Family’s viewpoints rely heavily on what many theologians would consider to be misinterpretations and non-contextual readings of Paul. In addition, the organization appears to mis-use some research and ignore others in order to maintain the accuracy of their viewpoints.

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Focus on the Family, Pauline Scripture, and Research: Comparing Viewpoints on Marriage and Women

Introduction

Throughout the last century outlooks on marriage, including the role of women in marriage and same-sex marriage, have changed drastically. As American society has shifted away from the family norms of the 1950s, differing opinions have risen regarding social changes such as the entrance of women into the workplace and their role as family providers, as well as the role of marriage in society and whether same-sex couples should be able to attain the legal status and benefits of marriage. One prominent voice in the melee of opinions is the Christian organization Focus on the Family. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the views of Focus on the Family on marriage and women, and compare them to both Paul's gospels and current research being done in the areas of women's roles in the family, and marriage.

Focus on the Family is a prominent Christian family-focused organization, and is arguably the most well-known and vocal Christian family-oriented group currently in the United States – which is the reason I chose the organization for this paper. The organization was founded in 1977 by James Dobson, an evangelical Christian and psychologist who became a widely known author of books on conservative positions and social issues. Dobson headed Focus on the Family until his retirement in 2003, although he remains close to the organization. During his time with Focus on the Family, Dobson aired a radio broadcast entitled *Focus on the Family*, which aired all across the country. However, because Dobson has since left Focus on the Family, in this paper I will include only sources currently being published by Focus on the Family instead of including Dobson's numerous books and speeches (most of which were published in the 1980's). Dobson is important, however, when talking about the history of the

organization, and the precedents he set while leading Focus on the Family can still be seen today. The majority of information from Focus on the Family used in this paper is from their website, www.focusonthefamily.org, primarily because their website is their principle mode of publication (along with their radio programs).

Although it is logical to assume that a conservative Christian group will have social conservative Christian values, the question is whether those values reflect modern biblical interpretation, specifically Pauline scripture. The reason for focusing on Pauline scripture instead of the whole Biblical New Testament (or even the whole Bible) is because of the frequency of its usage as a resource in Christian literature; Evangelical Christianity uses Pauline sources as taking precedence over other biblical sources on marriage and women (as opposed to other books, such as the Old Testament book Genesis). However, reading and referencing Paul's letters is not as straight-forward as one may think, not only because the context in which the letters were written must be taken into consideration, but also because of authorship debates that surround six of Paul's thirteen letters.

It is also appropriate to consider the view of Focus on the Family in light of current research and modern scholastic theory. While women's roles in the family and in marriage research has dropped off in the current century, several researchers in the 1980's and 1990's undertook research on the topic, and some current scholars have condensed such research into reviews while adding results from smaller, more current studies on women's roles. Trends in marriage, on the other hand, continues to be a topic which researchers gravitate towards. In the 1970s, researchers began to study the results of declining so-called "traditional" marriages, while today researchers are studying the effects of same-sex partnerships and marriage, both on society and on children raised by same-sex parents. In addition, this paper will cover Focus on the

Family's use of academic papers in their own publications, as well as the authors' responses to the organization's use of their work.

Overview of Focus on the Family's beliefs and views

Focus on the Family's website includes articles concerning parenting and social issues, as well as news coverage and comments on such issues. There are many different aspects of marriage covered, including same-sex marriage, divorce, and adoption. Comparatively, there are relatively few articles concerning women and their roles in marriage; however, there are enough of them to construct a clear picture of Focus on the Family's outlook on the topic.

Marriage:

Marriage, very simply and strictly, is between one man and one woman. Focus on the Family cites the Bible as a whole as their reasoning, citing the book of Genesis and the creation of woman from the rib of man. Man and woman "complement" each other in marriage, and are necessary counterparts to each other to fulfill their mission in Christ. Focus on the Family also addresses what they refer to as "Revisionist Gay Theory," which is a self-created idea of using Bible verses to "redefine homosexual behavior as God-ordained and morally permissible." (Focusonthefamily.com) The article entitled *Revisionist Gay Theory* describes the supporters of same-sex marriage as defending this position by claiming that Christians against same-sex marriage misread biblical texts, that Christian leaders are merely speaking out against homosexuality to increase personal visibility, that scriptures used to reject same-sex marriage have been mistranslated, and that these same scriptures are being taken out of context.

Focus on the Family addresses homosexuality in general by urging those with “unnatural urges” to contact their pastor or a counselor to talk to. They “believe that those who struggle with...same-sex sexual temptation can choose to steward their impulses in a way that aligns with...faith convictions” (Focusonthefamily.com) because Focus on the Family believes that people with same-sex orientational urges can “realign” their feelings.

Besides arguing against same-sex marriage on the basis of biblical verses, Focus on the Family also argues that same-sex marriage should not be allowed on the basis that “gays and lesbians do not make good parents,” something that Dobson also said in his Time Magazine guest article *Two Mommy’s is One Too Many* in 2006. Focus on the Family indicates on their website that children positively NEED both a father and a mother in their lives in order to develop into happy, healthy adults. The organization cites research done by Judith Stacey as well as Kyle Pruett and Carol Gilligan to back up their claims that the “best interests of children are served when there is (one) father and (one) mother.”

Focus on the Family strongly supports adoption – in fact, in viewing their website, one is first redirected to an ad to donate money to their organization to help fund foster parents in the United States for children waiting to be adopted; the ad also includes a link for prospective adoptive parents. However, Focus on the Family is very specific in saying *who* should be able to apply to adopt. Citing the same research as above, the organization says that while they urge as many people as possible to adopt because “Christians are called by God to take care of the father-less,” same-sex couples should not be able to adopt – either in the United States nor internationally (Focusonthefamily.com). Focus on the Family has started a petition urging national, state, and local governments to change the laws regarding adoption agencies abilities to turn away same-sex couples wanting to adopt, saying that “the adoption process is now used as

an avenue to advance homosexual rights.” (Focusonthefamily.com) Non-discrimination laws, they claim, force adoption agencies to work against their own personal morals to allow same-sex couples to apply to adopt. In addition, single homosexuals should definitely not be able to adopt. In fact, Focus on the Family encourages adoption agencies to turn away all single parents.

Moving back to the view Focus on the Family has on marriage in general, the organization supports a traditional two-parent nuclear family type of marriage dynamic. Marriage is “God’s design,” and husbands and wives should follow God’s plan for their marriage. Cohabiting before marriage is frowned upon, mostly because the time of marriage is when everything should switch over from single life to married life. Focus on the Family points to census studies saying that cohabitation is linked to greater unhappiness, lower levels of satisfaction, greater likelihood of domestic violence, and a higher likelihood of divorce once the couple does get married (Focusonthefamily.com). However, once married, Focus on the Family does not condone divorce; instead, the organization urges couples contemplating divorce to spend a short amount of time apart and use the time to figure out what God wants for them. All efforts should be made to keep the marriage together; and in fact the only reason a couple should seriously contemplate divorce is in the case of domestic abuse (i.e. for the safety of the abused spouse and any children).

Women:

Focus on the Family primarily talks about women and their role in society in the context of marriage and family. The organization views the roles of men and women in parenting differently; while the role of the father to his children is to “validate” them (make them feel loved, accomplished, and good about themselves), the role of the mother to her children is to

“nurture” them (physically take care of their needs and emotional development). In addition, Focus on the Family emphasizes the role of stay-at-home moms, and primarily focuses on being available for one’s children, as well as the “art of homemaking.” The point of view on women seems to come more from a 1950s marriage view point as opposed to any biblical literature.

Focus on the Family frames sexuality as purely within marriage (different-sex marriage) and includes the role of God in the act. Women are urged to understand their husband’s sexual needs, and to know when their husband isn’t interested in sex, while men are given no such advice. In fact, women are not said to have any sort of needs or get anything out of sex, with the exception of a pregnancy. The article on “Understanding your Husband’s Needs,” written by Dr. Juli Slattery, includes information on what sex is to a man – a physical need, emotional need, spiritual need, and relational need. However, women’s needs are not mentioned by Focus on the Family at all. Dr. Slattery focuses primarily on men’s physical need for sex in the Focus on the Family article, saying that “One of the biggest differences between you (a wife) and your husband is the fact that he experiences sex as a legitimate physical need.” Conversely, women do not experience the same physiological need, and so don’t understand the need to have sex – or feel an urge to be sexual as men do (Focusonthefamily.com).

In the second article, “When Your Husband Isn’t Interested in Sex,” again by Dr. Slattery, the byline reads: “You cannot underestimate[sic] how injurious it can be for your husband to find himself unable to perform sexually or to become the victim of a nonexistent libido.” This sentence does well as an overview of the tone of the article: to sum up, man’s outlook on himself is tied to his libido, while his wife’s outlook of herself is tied to her ability to sexually please her husband.

Pauline Scripture

Paul of Tarsus wrote thirteen of the books in the biblical New Testament; these thirteen “books” were actually letters Paul wrote to various cities across the first century Greek world. Paul’s letters continue to be very popular within Christianity, as Paul seems to address several issues that are still central to faith today. Here, I am focusing on Paul’s letters because the scope of the paper does not allow a survey of the entire Bible. In addition, it is important to understand the context in which Paul wrote his letters – first century Greece was a mix of empires and religions, and Paul grew up in a Jewish family (and became a Pharisee) but witnessed a secular society. Finally, and perhaps the most important thing to remember when reading Pauline scripture, is that what you are reading is someone’s mail – Paul’s letters. However, it is also important to note here that six of the thirteen Pauline books are contested by scholars who contend that those six books do not match the other seven letters in important ways, such as diction, grammar, and subject matter. The six contested letters are: Ephesians, Colossians, 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus; this is important because some of the verses used to justify Conservative Christian points of view come from these contested letters.

Marriage:

Surprisingly, Paul actually said very little about marriage; 1st Corinthians is the only place Paul addresses marriage specifically. In fact, Paul supported Christian marriage only in the context of someone not being able to suppress their sexual desires; if one were not able to suppress their sexual desires, one should get married. First, it is important to understand what marriage was and what “marriage” meant in the first century Greek world. Marriage during Paul’s time was economically and often politically based. Young women were often forced into

arranged marriages to much older men for the advancement of her family in the Greek society. Men were not expected to get married until a much older age than women; usually, young men spent their time working (as an apprentice) or participating in the political system. And so, the very few times Paul spoke of marriage, this is what he was addressing. (Ruden, 2010, ch. 4)

Paul seems to say a bit more about homosexuality and same-sex partnerships than marriage in general, and his Romans passage on homosexuality is widely used to condemn same-sex partnerships. However, it is extremely important to understand the context and social world in which Paul wrote the passage in order to understand what he is really saying.

Romans 1:24-32 “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

Sarah Ruden covers the immensely complex social strata being addressed in this letter by Paul in her book, *Paul Among the People*, and her description puts the verses in a cultural context. In first century Greek society, male homosexual acts were not just a possibility, but very commonplace and in fact essentially accepted among the highest ranks of society. However, it was not simply a culture of homosexual acts or same-sex partnerships, it was a society of rape; one which celebrated the high-society man who hunted down and made a young man his passive

partner (or his “cinaedi”). These young men were looked down upon as weak, violated, and unworthy of being a so-called real man. The older men were seen as powerful and this practice was widely accepted. (Ruden, 2010, p. 49)

Paul rejects this entire culture, saying that it is evil, and the city’s sins have made that situation come to fruition. (Romans 1:24) Overall though, Paul is calling out the Romans for their inclination to use each other in ways that were not Holy – not in the sense of two people in a committed relationship loving each other, but in the sense of one man physically over-taking another man for his own pleasure, and at the detriment of the violated man,

As Paul was beseeching the Romans to reject their lifestyle of wonton, extramarital same-sex rape, his goal was to paint marriage as something to be regarded by both spouses as important. Regarding sex as a union only acceptable in the binds of marriage, Paul urged the Romans to see it as a union in the eyes of God, not just for social or political reasons. In addition, Paul urged his readers to see marriage as an egalitarian partnership, which was especially unheard of in the Greek male-centered society. As he was asking Christians to only engage in sex while married, he also wrote about sex as not only for procreation, but also as an act of unity and as part of the marriage (Ruden, 2010, ch. 7) – something that was new in the Roman Christian idea of sex.

Women:

Contrary to the subject of marriage, Paul said quite a bit about women and a woman’s role in a marriage and in society; and Paul is very often misunderstood on this topic as well. George Bernard Shaw is famous for his quote naming Paul the “eternal enemy of women.” (Pagels 1974, pg. 528) However, when looked at in context and time period, it is obvious that Paul is decidedly not an enemy of women. On this topic as well it is important to understand the

culture in which Paul is writing his letter in order to fully understand not only why he said what he did, but even to understand what exactly he is saying. The meaning and function of marriage in Paul's world has already been described above, and women's roles in those marriages followed suit. Women were married off to advance their families' social position, and then her role was to run the house and bear children. Married women were expected to stay indoors for the most part; the general idea of what a woman wanted in the world was, simply, sex. Women were seen as sexually insatiable (Ruden, 2010, ch. 7), and so a woman should only emerge into society to support her husband politically, or to take part in religious ceremonies or church events. Women were expected to be faithful to their husbands, despite the fact that married men were well-known to engage in extramarital affairs (with members of either sex).

In addition, women were expected to act according to their class station. Although this fact would have been the same for both men and women, for women there was much more involved in acting to that station. While men of all social classes were invited to and accepted in the public forum, a woman was not allowed no matter what her social status was. Women also behaved and acted differently in church depending on their social status (Ruden, 2010, ch. 4).

One example that Paul addresses is the practice of wearing a veil in church; as seen in 1st Corinthians Chapter 11 Verses 2-16.

1st Corinthians 11:2-16: "Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were

shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.”

In Paul’s time, wealthy women wore veils over their heads in places of worship as both a symbol of their wealth and a symbol of their piety. Paul addresses this by stating that all women should wear a veil in church – regardless of their social status. This was a very radical idea during Paul’s time, as the Corinthians were so strict about this rule that so-called “veil police” would patrol and make sure women were wearing the correct veil (which changed based on wealth and marital status). Punishments were handed out not only for poor women wearing an incorrect veil, but also to wealthy women who weren’t wearing a veil, or who were wearing an incorrect veil. The point Paul was trying to make, then, is that all women should be equal in the church – no matter if a woman is poor or wealthy, she deserves to be able to wear a veil in church as a sign of piety and Holiness. Ruden puts it as such, “I think Paul’s rule aimed toward

an outrageous equality. All Christian women were to cover their heads in church, without distinction of beauty, wealth, respectability – or of privilege so great as to allow toying with traditional appearances.” (Ruden 2010, pg. 87)

The second example that Paul gives us is also in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 14, Verses 33-35; here, Paul addresses women talking in church.

1st Corinthians 14:32-35: “32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

Traditionally, interpreters have taken Paul’s words literally, saying that women should not talk in church, or even become leaders in the church. However, knowing that Paul used women as disciples and preachers, it is hard to take that traditional interpretation in the same way. Instead, modern Pauline scholars address these verses similarly to the previous verses on veils in churches. In Paul’s time, women were not allowed in all churches, and they were never allowed to speak (or “prophecy”) in church. Paul’s idea that women should be in church – or indeed even have religious questions that needed to be addressed – were incredibly liberal ideas in his time. These two interpretations of Pauline scripture make these verses consistent with Paul’s other scriptural ideas – although it is important to note that some scholars would contend that these verses are not genuine Pauline verses, but verses added to Paul’s letters later on by men who thought they should be added. This viewpoint has much merit but is beyond the scope

of this paper. Conservative Christians, like Focus on the Family, would view Pauline authorship of “his epistles” as unquestionable.

Overall, Paul calls for a very egalitarian society, both between men and women and between the wealthy and the poor. He called for equality in marriage, but also in religion, and thought women were equal to men when it came to the people he sent out to preach, and he encouraged women to study religion and ask questions at appropriate times. Paul also rejected the social idea that women could not control themselves, and would be sexual vixens if left to their own devices; instead, Paul wrote that women were (in essence) people too (Ruden, 2010, chp. 4).

Paul said very little about the role of women as mothers, but urged them to be faithful wives and hold an equal position in their household with their husbands. Paul also wrote about women as having their own goals and lives according to their Christian faith, saying in 1st Corinthians 7:17, “...only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to (them), and to which God has called (them).”

Research

Modern studies seem to be centered on two main areas: same-sex couples and gender role orientation and perceptions among married different-sex couples. Gender role studies tend to be older; centered in the 1970s through the 1990s, and focused on the changing gender roles in other-sex marriages as compared to other-sex marriages in the 1950s. Comparatively, current studies tend to be more focused on how men and women comprehend women’s roles in the family as compared to in the workplace. As current studies inevitably mesh ideas of marriage

and women (and most “marriage” studies right now have to do with same-sex marriages and parenting), it is difficult to separate the two ideas for this section – even though I have separated the two ideas for the purposes of this paper; but I will attempt to do so.

Marriage:

Obviously, times have changed and traditional marital values are no longer a widely-kept norm. For example, couples no longer widely abstain from pre-marital sex, and it is no longer as socially taboo in many segments of society. This means that it is not uncommon at all for unmarried couples to have children together. However, studies have shown that the presence of children in a relationship has no statistical bearing on the end result of that relationship – in other words, couples – married or unmarried – with children are no more or less likely to get divorced (or separate) as compared to couples without children (Mullins, Brackett, Bogie, and Pruett, 2004).

Couples are much more likely now to cohabitate before marriage than in past decades, and it is much more socially acceptable to do so. Although the U.S. Census Bureau does not keep statistics on the percentage of the United States’ population that is cohabiting at any given moment, the estimate by the Census Bureau is that around 6.5% of the adult population in the United States is cohabiting, and studies can tell us about the characteristics of those couples who are cohabiting. According to 2012 Census data, 35% of couples who cohabit are between the ages of 25 and 34, and this age group represents the largest age group of cohabiters. However, 13% of cohabiters are over the age of 55, and 4% are over the age of 65. The majority of cohabiting couples (62%) have never been married, while 34% are divorced or separated. Thirty-five per cent of cohabiting couples have no more education than a high school diploma,

and this category represents the largest category of cohabiting couples in terms of level of education. In addition, almost 60% of cohabiting couples do not have children. Reasons to cohabitate vary widely, and can include everything from a desire to save money, to raise children, or cohabiting with the goal of eventual marriage (Jason, 2012).

Woods and Emery conducted a study published in 2008 that investigated the claims by previous researchers that cohabitation before marriage is more likely to lead to divorce as compared to couples who do not live with each other until right before, or after the wedding. They then used information from the 1998 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to assess different factors of cohabitation and divorce, including ethnicity, religion, and personal attribute of delinquency. The results of their study concluded that cohabitation accounted for very little variance in divorce rates when these other factors were taken into consideration.

Religious homogeneity also has an effect on divorce rates. The study by Mullins, Brackett, Bogie, and Pruett (2004) showed that, when a couple is more in line with each other in the area of religion, they are less likely to get divorced. The study used known religious factors associated with divorce as a jumping-off point; previous studies have shown that interfaith marriages are more likely to end in divorce than intrafaith marriages, and individual persons that claim to have no religious affiliation at all have the highest divorce rates of any religious group. Social structurally, religious couples have less of a chance of getting divorced for several reasons; for example, religion acts as a stabilizing agent both to the couple and the community (and the more stable, supportive, and religious the community, the lower the number of divorces occur). In addition, the study also concluded that physically taking part in religious ceremonies on a regular basis can lower a couple's chances for divorce. Religious concentration by geographic region was also considered, and it was found that the higher the concentration of like-

minded religious churches or organizations an area has, the lower number of divorces occur in that area (in other words, the number of divorces is inversely correlated to the density of religion in a given geographic region) (Mullines, Brackett, Bogie, and Pruett, 2004).

Studies continue to be conducted studying the effects of same-sex relationships and marriages, particularly as they effect the development of children. However, this topic is not the primary point of this paper, so I will summarize the pertinent information as much as possible. Studies have failed to make a connection between being raised by same-sex parents, and children developing in a pattern not normal for children raised by separated parents or single parents (Patterson, 2006). That is to say, children of same-sex parents will face adversity; however, studies have shown that the adversity in such a situation is no more traumatizing than being raised by a single parent or in a separated family. A study by Golombok, et al. (2003) showed that lesbian mothers raise their children very similarly to straight mothers, and same-sex partners have the same level of involvement with children as compared to biological or step-fathers. In addition, this same study showed that there is no difference in gender development between children raised by same-sex parents and children raised by other-sex parents.

Another study, this one done by Charlotte J. Patterson (2006), found that the only statistically reliable difference between the two groups (i.e. children raised by lesbian mothers as compared to children raised by other-sex parents) was that children being brought up by lesbian parents “felt a greater sense of connection to people at school” (p. 242). Patterson also concluded that parental sexual orientation is much less important to child development and adolescent integration into society than the qualities of family relationships. This is supported by other studies that have found that child development is most interrupted by multiple transitions in life, which can be very stressful to children.

Of course, there are some studies that have come to the conclusion that being raised by same-sex parents is detrimental to children's development; one such example is the study published by Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin entitled, "*Queers as Folk: does it really make no difference if your parents are straight or gay?*" in which Regnerus concludes that "When compared with outcomes for children raised by an "intact biological family" (with a married, biological mother and father), *the children of homosexuals did worse (or, in the case of their own sexual orientation, were more likely to deviate from the societal norm) on 77 out of 80 outcome measures.*" (emphasis in original) (Sprigg, 2012). Studies such as this one have been used by individuals and groups to reject the idea of same-sex marriage and the ability of same-sex couples to raise children (such as the Family Research Council).

However, studies such as those are in an extreme minority, and are often rebuked for their research methods and ethics. In the case of this study by Regnerus, he was accused of "research misconduct" (Steffan, 2012), and "An internal audit by the academic journal that originally published it found the conclusions to be "bullshit"" (emphasis original) (Ford, 2012). In addition, in an interview with Focus on the Family, Regnerus admitted that he misrepresented the study, because instead of studying same-sex, openly homosexual couples and their children, he instead included any adult that had reported having at least once same-sex encounter – "In other words, the study's results have *zero* implication for conversations in 2012 about out, committed same-sex couples who are already raising children." (Ford, 2012). The majority of published studies on same-sex partners show that they are stable, loving parents, and the average relationship length is the same as other-sex relationships; and in addition, partners in same-sex relationships report being just as happy and committed to each other as other-sex partners do.

Women:

The idea of “marriage” has a long and varied history; renowned family studies author Stephanie Coontz provides a succinct overview of the history of marriage in her article, *“Traditional’ marriage has changed a lot.”* Coontz outlines what ‘marriage’ meant historically, noting that, throughout history, ‘marriage’ meant several different things. In addition, Coontz points out that it wasn’t until 1215 that the Catholic Church made marriage a sacrament, and it wasn’t until even later that specific ceremonies had to be performed to make a marriage legitimate (Coontz, 2006). Legally marriage has changed significantly over time as well; in Roman tradition, “the only difference between marriage and unmarried cohabitation was if the partners thought of themselves as married.” (Coontz, 2006).

This history complicates the idea of a ‘traditional’ marriage or family structure. Normally, a ‘traditional’ marriage is defined by economic necessity and roles, which, in mid-twentieth century America, meant the husband was the breadwinner and the wife worked as a homemaker. This image of ‘traditional’ marriage is one that some people still hold on to; however, it is not the normal image of marriage anymore in the United States. Gender roles within marriage continue to change, with the primary changes being in the roles of women.

A recent article by Marina Adshade (2013) in the Wall Street Journal addressed the educational imbalance between genders and what that means for women. According to the Pew Research Center, wives have “significantly more” education than their husbands in 28% of marriages in the United States. The reverse is only true in 19% of marriages. This can mean several things; Adshade points out that when the wife has a much greater level of education, husbands have a large incentive to share decision-making power within the family and the relationship – mostly because their wives now have the financial power to leave their husbands

and live independently if they feel they are not sharing enough decision-making power in their relationship. With greater education also comes greater earning power and husbands would lose a great deal of their income if the wife were to leave.

Some researchers have said that this increase in education and earning power of women has had a hand in the increasing divorce rate in the last few decades. An economics study by Ressler and Waters (2000) seems to support this idea. Traditionally, the thought was that increases in female earnings increased divorce rates; however, Ressler and Waters found a two way causality between a rise in female earnings and divorce rates. “On the one hand, the incidence of divorce often results in women having to either enter the workforce, or make the transition from secondary to primary wage earner. On the other hand, women who are themselves relatively high wage earners are typically more educated and therefore more able and likely to end an unsatisfactory marriage.” (p. 1897) This touches on the idea that women are making more money now, and are therefore freer to leave a marriage and more able to take care of themselves independently. However, Ressler and Waters point out that this is a two-way causality relationship – it goes both ways.

Gender roles are important when looking at cohabiting couples and rates of divorce, especially as the roles of men and women in relationships change. Men and women tend to report slightly different gender role orientation, as seen in the 2008 study by Livingston and Judge, *Emotional responses to work-family conflict: an examination of gender role orientation among working men and women*. This study examines guilt connected with family interfering with work, and work interfering with family. The hypothesis that Livingston and Judge began with was that couples and individuals with traditional values would feel more guilt connected with family interfering with work. What the authors found was that, while their expectations

were somewhat correct, the responses they received were much more complicated. Couples and individuals that labeled themselves as having traditional gender roles felt more guilt when family interfered with work, while those who labeled themselves as having more egalitarian gender roles felt more guilt when work interfered with family. Overall, women were more likely than men to experience guilt when work interfered with family. The authors suggested that the implications on gender role orientation are actually fairly equal – men feel guilt when work interferes with family as women do (However, the authors suggested that those results may have been affected by men who did not want to admit to feeling guilt when work interfered with family). Overall, this study suggests that both men and women are beginning to see gender roles in a more egalitarian way.

Another study on gender roles authored by Zuo and Tang (2000) compared gender ideologies of men and women regarding family roles, comparing answers to the same survey in 1980 and 1999. In general, both men and women have become more egalitarian since 1980; however, this progression is more prominent among women than among men. Men in general have become more supportive of their wives' employment, which suggests that men in general have largely abandoned the idea of being the sole breadwinner. Still, overall, men are more conventional than women in gender ideology; however, an important exception was that men favored egalitarianism more than their wives did when it came to their wives' maternal role. Another important note is that women of higher earner status and men of lower earner status tend to hold unconventional gender role ideologies. This suggests that, while both men and women have become more egalitarian since 1980, high-earning men and low-earning women still favor traditional gender roles.

Comparison and Discussion

As society's outlook on marriage and women's roles change, it is important to understand what kind of research is being conducted in this area. As Focus on the Family is the most popular Christian-based family organization in the United States, it is also important to know and understand what their stance is on marriage and gender roles; in addition then, it is just as important to understand what those viewpoints are based on, and if they are consistent with the Bible (their source). Here, Focus on the Family's viewpoints will be compared and contrasted with Pauline scripture before being compared to current research.

Focus on the Family and Paul on marriage:

It is difficult to compare Focus on the Family's views on marriage to Paul's viewpoints on marriage because, as mentioned above, Paul never wrote extensively about marriage. Most everything Paul did say about marriage pointed toward an equal partnership, saying, "You are not your own" in 1st Corinthians. Paul urged men and women to commit to each other in marriage – as opposed to the normal that he knew, which was a forcefully devoted wife and a husband who was permitted to do as he wished. Focus on the Family definitely supports Christ-centered marriages, where both spouses are committed and faithful to the relationship. Paul also supported the act of sex within marriage – not only for procreation, but also as a symbol of love and connection. Focus on the Family encourages married couples to use sex in a healthy way to create a union and shared experience between themselves, as well as for the pleasure aspects.

One aspect of the marriage relationship that Focus on the Family advocates that is very different compared to Paul their focus on the husband's pleasure and sexual needs, while completely ignoring women's needs or troubles. Under Focus on the Family's *Marriage &*

Relationships area, there are several articles on “Sex and Intimacy,” including topics such as “God’s Design for Sex, and “Building a Pure Marriage.” It also includes the two articles entitled, “Understanding Your Husband’s Sexual Needs,” and “When Your Husband Isn’t Interested in Sex.” There are no articles on wives’ needs, nor is the possibility mentioned in the article on husband’s needs.

Large portions of Focus on the Family’s publications are on the topic of social issues, and homosexuality is a large part of that section. Focus on the Family has been publically against same-sex marriage since its inception by James Dobson. Indeed, Paul’s writings on same-sex relations have been used by Christians to reject same-sex relationships for several hundred years. However, after contextualizing Paul’s letter and understanding what he was referring to, I fail to make such a clear-cut connection between what Paul says and the conclusion that Focus on the Family has made. While it is impossible to know what Paul would have said about the use of his letter to deny relationship opportunities to same-sex couples, it is safe to say that Focus on the Family (and indeed several religious groups) have misinterpreted and contextualized Paul’s letter into a meaning Paul did not intend.

While Paul said very little about marriage, he said almost nothing about the idea of adoption in the sense that we think of it today; in Romans, Paul references adoption in the sense of God adopting you as His child. However, Paul advised his readers to take care of each other, and that included young orphaned children. Focus on the Family also supports adoption, both of children in the United States and internationally. Again, however, Focus on the Family points out that neither same-sex couples nor single adults should be able to adopt, as children need two parents in their lives (a mother and a father). However, as Paul does not mention guidelines for adoption (he was focused elsewhere), it is important to focus on the main tenants of Christianity.

Paul tells his readers that following Christ is not about the rituals (his example is circumcision), but about following the main ideas – love one another, and treat others as you wish to be treated. In this way, it seems natural to encourage competent adults to adopt and provide a stable home for a child without one.

It is also noteworthy that Paul did not disapprove of divorce or separation, especially in cases of abuse or if one wanted to follow Paul's model and spread Christianity throughout the Greek world. This was the case for both men and women; Paul did not differentiate, instead calling all Christians to spread the word.

Focus on the Family and studies on marriage:

One of the most obvious comparisons to make between Focus on the Family's outlook on marriage and the studies outlined above is on cohabitation before marriage. According to Focus on the Family, cohabitation has risen 72% since 1990, and "Living together (before marriage) leaves you vulnerable, causing you to doubt the level of your partner's dedication." They then cite the research that came to the conclusion that cohabitation before marriage leads to a higher probability of divorce. Focus on the Family also says that cohabitation before marriage is "correlated with greater likelihood of unhappiness, and domestic violence in the relationship." However, Focus on the Family does not say which study they are citing (although it has been widely researched and accepted that premarital cohabitation leads to a higher probability for divorce). Currently, studies are being conducted that are breaking apart factors that lead to couples cohabitating before marriage. The study by Woods and Emery called into question the blanket risk of cohabitation, and found that other factors (such as ethnicity and religion) play a

much larger role in the risk for divorce, and that couples with those factors may just be more likely to cohabitate before marriage than other couples.

One topic that Focus on the Family advocates that was not mentioned in the section above is resources for individuals whose significant other is not religious. The organization focuses on the need to be in sync with your partner religiously, mostly for your own religious well-being. However, as seen in the study by Mullins, Brackett, Bogie and Pruett, practicing the same religion as your partner is actually beneficial to your marriage. Although the study addresses religious homogeneity as a factor in divorce, and Focus on the Family encourages intrafaith partnerships for your religious well-being, the idea of practicing the same religion as your significant other is – for many reasons – beneficial for your relationship.

Studies on same-sex partnerships tend to focus on children raised by same-sex partners; however, Focus on the Family also focuses on same-sex partners in the context of parenting, so the comparison is made slightly simpler here. Although Focus on the Family cites Judith Stacey's research as providing evidence that same-sex couples do not make good parents, Stacey accused the organization of misrepresenting her research. Stacey's study was comparing children raised in two-parent different-sex families to children raised in one parent families, not comparing children raised in same-sex versus different-sex parent households. A similar situation occurred when Focus on the Family used Pruett and Gilligan's work to claim that two women could not raise a child together. In this case, Focus on the Family was ordered to refrain from using either researchers work again without their express permission. Most current research being conducted in this decade has found, like the two studies presented in the section above, that there is no discernible difference in the development of children raised in same-sex parent households. The one major concern of children of same-sex parents being teased by their

peers is not, in the opinion of most scholars, a situation that would cause extreme detrimental effects, as it might be a similar experience to a minority child being teased by their peers.

Focus on the Family and Paul on Women:

While Focus on the Family frames their viewpoints on women in the context of motherhood and marriage, there are still a couple of important points that can be compared with Paul's letters. First, Focus on the Family primarily talks about women as mothers and home-makers, while Paul addresses women as active members of the church and encourages them to be active in society. Secondly, Paul encouraged women to be an equal to her husband, and embrace her sexuality. Focus on the Family encourages equality in marriage for the most part, although there are several areas in which it is obvious that the husband is meant to be in charge, and thus more powerful, such as when handling money and when making sexual decisions.

Although Focus on the Family does not address gender roles beyond the maternal job of nurturing and the paternal job of validating, the general female gender role is outlined in their stances on sex and marriage, as well as the heavily maternal role outlined under marriage, children, and social issues. Paul addresses gender roles indirectly but heavily as he instructed women to throw off social norms by all wearing veils in church, as well as attending church services and asking questions at the appropriate times. It is important to remember that the Bible was written by men, and put together by men; for Paul to address women and encourage them to take part in religion was risky but important to the Christian life Paul was trying to encourage.

Paul also encourages women to move on with their lives after the death of a spouse, something that would have been unheard of in his time. Although men were encouraged to remarry if their wives died, widows donned a mourning veil and became dependent on her male

sons, or her late husband's family. This is another example of Paul encouraging egalitarian ideas between men and women.

Focus on the Family and Studies on Women and Gender Roles:

Focus on the Family paints an image of a stay-at-home mother who takes time for herself to re-charge while the children are sleeping, and stays more passive with her husband; men are shown as the breadwinner and decision-maker. On the contrary, this picture is very traditional, while social norms have changed, and both men and women see gender roles differently. On average, women are now more educated than men, and hold a growing amount of buying power. In short, whether husbands agree or not, marriages have become more egalitarian as women control more of the income. Although studies indicate that both men and women have developed more egalitarian gender role orientations over the last twenty years, Focus on the Family does not seem to advocate for egalitarian gender roles. There is not a wealth of material, however, in this area from Focus on the Family. Like Paul, there are subjects that are not a high priority to the organization as they strive to publish material that conveys issues they perceive as their priorities.

Conclusion

Focus on the Family's viewpoints on marriage and women, like their overall social views, are very conservative. After comparing the organization's viewpoints with Pauline scripture, it becomes clear that while some of their claims are built upon Paul's letters, most of their points seem to be taken from conservative ideas about what the Bible says. Ideas such as the inability of same-sex couples to receive social marriage benefits or raise children, or women being put into submission in the church come from Pauline scriptural ideas that have been

reinterpreted and taken out of context to the point where Paul's true meaning is no longer coming through.

After comparing Focus on the Family's viewpoints with recent research on the same or similar topics, it has also become clear that the organization may be setting a negative example by using out-of-date research. In addition, the organization's propensity to take research findings out of context, or pull specific portions out in order to support their point of view, seems to support the idea that Focus on the Family's outlooks are not backed by research, but that they are simply trying to mislead readers in order to convince them to live a lifestyle the organization would sanction.

Overall, my recommendation to readers of Focus on the Family's publications is to take their writings and advice with several grains of salt. The organization espouses traditional conservative Christian ideas; however, several of these ideas are misrepresented or misinterpreted letters of Paul – and some ideas are taken out of context completely. The seeming lack of regard for solid research also causes pause, especially because the organization cites out of date research or takes current findings out of context for their own gain.

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